

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 001771

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/22/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [MOPS](#) [AG](#) [MO](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: RETIRED CHOD COMMENTS ON MOROCCAN BORDER ISSUES

Classified By: Ambassador Richard W. Erdman, Reason 1.4 (b) (d)

11. (C) At a dinner hosted by the Saudi Defense Attache August 20, DCM was seated facing former Algerian CHOD General Mohammed Lamari, who retired one year ago. The Tunisian and Moroccan attaches were seated at the same table. Lamari began reminiscing about the war of independence from France, describing in some detail the two electrified barbed wire fences with minefields in between that the French constructed in the 1950s along hundreds of kilometers of Algeria's frontiers with both Morocco and Tunisia. Lamari described how the Algerian independence fighters learned to breach the barriers, noting that after independence, Algeria wanted to preserve sections of the fences as a monument to the thousands who died trying to cross them. However, the government's intentions had been undercut by simple farmers who dismantled the fences and minefields on their own in order to sell or use the barbed wire and explosive charges. Lamari said that although hundreds of farmers died trying to dismantle the French mines, their deaths did not dissuade others. Now nothing was left of the French barriers except for a small display in the Algiers Military Museum.

12. (C) Having raised the Moroccan border issue in the context of the war of independence, Lamari segued to smuggling along the border today. He complained that although the border has been closed since 1994, Moroccans smuggled large quantities of drugs into Algeria. Originally the drug trade had been intended for European markets, but in the last few years, Algeria had become a consumer of Moroccan-produced drugs as well. Lamari said that at one time, Algerian soldiers had shoot-on-sight orders along the Moroccan border, since, he argued, it was impossible to distinguish smugglers from terrorists. The Army had changed this approach, however, since they found they were shooting simple smugglers. Lamari charged that cannabis cultivation in Morocco was tolerated by the Moroccan government.

13. (C) At this point, the Moroccan DATT, who had been listening without comment, objected, saying that cannabis cultivation was not only illegal in Morocco but the government had recently increased the legal penalties. The problem was that the northern Rif area of Morocco was densely forested mountains and it was very difficult for the police to eradicate the cannabis crops. Furthermore, smuggling networks were operated on both sides of the border, as partnerships between Moroccan and Algerian smugglers. Without conceding his point about Morocco's tolerance of cultivation, Lamari agreed it was true that the smuggling networks operated on both sides of the frontier.

14. (C) Indicating some frustration, Lamari commented that the Algerian police only arrested small-time dealers involved in the growing narcotics trade. "We know who the big heads are," he said, "but we cannot arrest them." Although Lamari added that was because the courts could not link the big dealers directly to the drug trade, it was evident from his tone that Lamari felt the big drug lords enjoyed political protection of some kind.

COMMENT

-----

15. (C) Both sides engage in regular cross-border activity. The Moroccan Ambassador has told us that Moroccan beach hotels in the Oujda area are full of Algerians, that Moroccans and Algerians cross the border every day in large numbers, in full view of the border police, and that there are set "fees" for the crossing, depending on whether one is on foot, in a taxi, or in a private vehicle. One of our FSNs, asked by Ambassador how his vacation went, replied they had a great time in Morocco and "there was no trouble at all in crossing the border."

BIOGRAPHIC NOTE

-----

16. (C) General Lamari has lost a great deal of weight, perhaps as much as 100 pounds, and looked much healthier than he had when he was still on active duty. Although he chain smoked throughout dinner, he commented that he had reduced his smoking from six to two packs a day.

ERDMAN